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BROWNBACK MEETS WITH KANSAS RESIDENT/ SURVIVOR OF SUDAN HUMAN RIGHTS ATROCITIES

WASHINGTON -- A Congressional leader on human rights, U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback today met in his Topeka office with current Overland Park resident Victoria Ajang, who recounted her powerful story of surviving extraordinary human rights abuses in southern Sudan.

Victoria Ajang is a native of southern Sudan who escaped human rights atrocities there. She has witnessed children being abducted into slavery, the bombing of villages, hospitals and schools resulting in countless civilian deaths, and became one of 4.3 million internally-displaced people (this is the largest internally-displaced population in the world).

While living in a refugee camp, she started a school which was destroyed by civilian bombing. In 1992, during a raid by the northern government, she was separated from her husband and one of their children. She has not seen them since. It was during that same raid that her aunt and three grandchildren were abducted by soldiers and forced into sexual concubinage and enslavement.

"Today, I am joined by Victoria Ajang, a Sudanese woman, who has suffered greatly during the civil war in the Sudan," Brownback said. "Through her testimony, I hope to bring attention to the continuing human rights abuses in the Sudan. This is particularly relevant given that this coming Sunday, November 14th, is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

"Some of the greatest suffering in the world today occurs in the Sudan where the fundamentalist North is fighting the African South which consists of mostly Christian and traditional believers. The Southern Sudanese are among the most brutalized civilian populations in the world. Where else are people routinely subject to ALL of the human rights atrocities of forced religious conversions, slavery, genocide, civilian bombing, government-manufactured famine, and chemical warfare, among other abuses?

"This is an urgent situation which demands a response. Two million dead in the last decade, 4.3 million pushed out of their ancient homelands and forced to live on the edge of starvation, making this the largest refugee population in the world. At least 100,000 (some say even 200,000) died last year because of the deliberate withholding of food aid by the National Islamic Front government from its own people. Incredibly, the abuse also includes the routine enslavement of women and children by government-backed militia, as well as forced religious conversions.

“Tens of thousands of Sudanese presently exist as chattel property, owned by masters who force their captives into hard labor and sexual concubinage. They are branded, beaten, starved and raped at their master's whim. Forced religious conversion is routinely practiced, with Christians and traditional tribal believers experiencing starvation and whippings until they renounce their own personal faiths. Moderate Muslims also suffer under this heavy yoke.

“It is unpardonable that slavery still exists in the Sudan. It is even more dismaying that slavery is officially tolerated, if not perpetrated, by a national government against its own people. I believe that America has a moral duty to challenge this practice and to call for the freedom of all enslaved Sudanese people. Consider this a modern day abolitionist movement inspired by the legacy of great freedom advocates like Martin Luther King, Jr. and William Wilberforce of Britain.

“That is why we are speaking to you today -- in recognition of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. This year, over 100,000 churches across America and 300,000 churches worldwide will be praying for the persecuted church, including Sudan, which has been targeted as a priority.

“This situation demands a response. As a nation dedicated to justice, we must boldly call upon the Sudanese government to stop terrorizing its people with civilian bombing, chemical warfare, slavery government-manufactured famine, and forced religious conversions.

“Victoria's own experience drives us to do the right thing. As she says, ‘You see, I live in two worlds. I may be here in Kansas, but in my mind I dream about home. I see the bones of starved people, who do not even have the energy to bury the dead around them. I see the dead in the river and hear them saying goodbye. I see the children carried off by the government raiders to be slaves. I may be driving in my car to work in Kansas City, but this is what I see’,” Brownback said.

Sen. Brownback has been a leader in rallying Congressional involvement to end human rights violations against the Southern Sudanese. Brownback led a Congressional delegation to the Sudan in June of this year, and was recognized for his efforts earlier this week at a Sudan human rights conference in Washington, D.C.

This year, Congress has become energized in response to this suffering. The Senate passed legislation authored by Brownback, giving humanitarian aid to the Southern Sudanese, as a part of S. 1234, the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill. In July, the Senate passed a resolution sponsored by Sen. Brownback, condemning the National Islamic Front government for its support of terrorism and its continued human rights violations. Brownback is an original cosponsor of the Sudan Peace Act (S. 1453).

The new Religious Liberty Commission has also identified the Sudan as a priority for advocacy this year, because of the forced conversions.

Brownback is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and sits on the African Affairs Subcommittee. He is also a commissioner on the Helsinki Commission (the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe).